

21W.731:01, Fall 2005
Rebecca Faery
Thursday, October 6

INVESTIGATIVE ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Proposal due October 25

First version due November 3 or 8*

(*depending on which day you signed up for)

Revisions due November 29

The essays you will submit on November 3 or 8 will be ones that require you to gather information on your subject—sufficient information to give you *authority* to speak on the topic and to ensure that the claim or argument you make is defensible and persuasive. The essay you will submit will, in other words, be an investigative one—that is, an essay that depends for its effectiveness not only on your style and voice, but also on information you gather from sources outside your own experience in order to speak convincingly and with *authority* on the subject you have chosen to write about. We'll talk in class about the ways some of the reading we've done falls into this category of writing.

What the investigative essay is NOT is a “research paper” in the sense you may be used to thinking of that genre in school. It must be an *essay*: your voice, your perspective, your persona must be evident in the piece, and, as in the other writing you are doing for the course, your lived experience can be included in the piece, as appropriate or desirable.

Finding a subject is your first challenge. What reading have we done that has inspired you to think about things differently? What have you wondered about lately and would like to know more about? What particular passions or interests do you have that you could make interesting to a reader? Where have you been, what have you done that might provide you a basis for further investigating and reporting? You need to be sure that your subject is one that you can inform yourself about adequately in the time you have, and you must give yourself *plenty of time* to do the reading, observing, checking out, thinking, interviewing, or whatever is necessary to support the claim you will make about your subject.

The investigation or research you do can, and very likely will, take a number of forms: conventional library research, online research, personal observation, interviews, viewing films or television programs, reading magazines or newspapers, collecting ads, gathering other kinds of data. In other words, in writing on some subject you find in popular culture, you will do what writers of articles in magazines and newspapers always do: you will gather information that will give shape and substance to your essay. These essays I hope will be strong candidates for publication in our edition of *Culture Shock!*

Your next step is to decide on a topic for your essay, and write a **proposal (due in class on Tuesday, October 25)**, which will consist of a paragraph or two describing (1)what you want to write about, (2)what point you want to make, (3)who your intended audience is, and (4)what sources you will consult to prepare yourself to write. The proposal must also have an **annotated bibliography** of sources you have found to help you in becoming sufficiently authoritative to have something substantive to say on your subject.

I will be glad to talk with you about your plans if you think a conversation with me would be helpful. You will also have a chance to present your plan to the rest of the class for their feedback and suggestions. I hope you will find this adventure in investigative journalism to be interesting and rewarding. And I look forward to reading what you write.